

Infinite Variant

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Summary: You ever wonder what it would be like to wake up in the Nasuverse? Don't lie, y'know you have. Well, here's a little secret for you; it's TERRIFYING! A world of Vampires, Monsters, psychopathic Magi and SO many more things in between. But I'm not interested in being some monsters meal or a lab experiment. When shit hits the fan, you can BET I'll be ready. Just you watch.

Infinite Variant

Chapter 1

****Wait. The Wizard DIDN'T Do It?****

xXx

oOoOoOoOo Eric oOoOoOoOo

'_Where am I?_'

That was the only question floating in his mind as he drifted across the emptiness. The single thought seemed to be all he could even think at all in the strange void he found himself in. But maybe that wasn't quite the only question he should be asking.

'_Am I dead?_'

His memories stirred at that, a basic picture seeming to form in the recesses of his own mind. He remembered shouting andâ€¦..and a gunshot. Then there were screams and he moved. The gunshots got louder and he tackled someone, unheeding the bleeding wounds in his own body from the bullet holes. Thrashing, punching, even biting the man with the gun before everything went dark.

Before he found himself here. In this strange void that was, apparently, the place people went when they died.

â€|Wow, those priests _really_ messed up about the whole Heaven thing, didn't they?

No matter how you sliced it, this place couldn't _possibly_ be called a Heaven. Probably not a Hell, either, unless those religious posers got _that_ wrong, too. And now he was stuck in here with nothing but his memories to keep him company. Was this really all he had to look forward to?

'â€|_Well, this sucks-_'

And then it happened. A strange pulling sensation. Wait, not pulling, more like falling. Or flowing, maybe. Whatever you called it, he somehow felt himself _move_.

So he watched as he moved through that empty void, that endless blackness, and slowlyâ€|.he started to _see_. He saw as the void around him began to change, somehow becoming less empty before his very eyes. He couldn't accurately say what he was even seeing, it evaded any form of description.

It started out as streaks ofâ€|.material? Light? It sure wasn't like anything he'd seen before. It looked like some kindaâ€|.solidified emptiness. That was all he could say it was, even as it shifted in shapes and colors that honestly made his head hurt.

Then more of the strange streaks appeared, seeming to somehow multiply and converge across his vision. First there was only a few, then he blinked and there was dozens, the more and less and more every time he blinked or looked away and back. It shifted into shapes and forms he couldn't even begin to describe, creatures and places and THINGS than he couldn't make sense of. Trying to keep them in his sights just seemed to give him migraines, as if his mind was refusing to comprehend it.

And that was before he saw _IT_.

Just catching the briefest glimpse seemed to set his mind on fire, like acid was being poured into his own skull. A gigantic _THING_ in the void, every shape and color and yet none of them. Everything and nothing, life and death, the beginning and the end, it was _ALL_ of these and more and yet none at all.

The fire in his mind grew worse as he seemed to get closer, flying towards it as it seemed to inexorably _pull_ him in. Like he was just water being sucked towards a hole in the sink, like dust being pulled through the Event Horizon of a Black Hole.

And he could feel his mind slip away with every passing moment as he moved closer. His vision dulling and his mind swimming, the strange sensation of every memory starting to fade until he realized he was becoming a blank slate.

He felt it as his body closed into the strange thing, felt his mind slip away into oblivion as his vision went black. He could even feel the sensation of his body disappearing as he closed in. It was just a matter of time before he was gone.

But right before he reached it, right before the bizarre oddity could claim him, right as his mind was on the verge of vanishing, a single

thought roared inside his mind.

'_NO!_'

And everything stopped. Literally everything around him seemed to freeze, as if rendered silent at his refusal to simply disappear into the void. He wasn't pulled any further, seeming to just be kept still in space.

He wasn't sure how, but he had the odd feeling he was beingâ€|observed. Like something in the blackness was observing him, measuring him as it came to a decision. It was actually a pretty terrifying feeling, the clarity that something immeasurably vast was looming over him, deciding on a fate he had no control or influence over.

There was really nothing more terrifying than realizing your own life was truly out of your own hands. Some might find it humbling, but he personally thought those people were idiots for thinking that.

Even as these thoughts moved through his head, he still felt the sensation of something looking him over. What's more is that he could've sworn it wasn't just looking at him physically, but looking at his Soul in some way. He couldn't think of some way to physically describe it, but he still couldn't help but feel it.

He wasn't sure how long it lasted, anywhere between minutes to hours, but he could at least tell when it was over. It was like he suddenly became lighter, like a very stifling presence suddenly disappeared and he could breathe without problems again.

â€|.Well, if he could even breathe at all here.

He was pretty sure he was about to say something snappy by the time he started moving again. But instead of moving towards the huge obstruction, he instead felt himself moving to the side and around it. It felt oddly like he was being shunted aside by it, allowed to leave so it could attend to more important matters. Was it sentient in some way?

He didn't have long to think about that, unfortunately, because he quickly found himself speeding up. The moment he got a certain distance away, he seemed to immediately accelerate through the void towards some far off corner of nowhere. He was going so fast that he'd probably be screaming his lungs right out. Well, if he still had working lungs, it was kinda hard to tell if he really still had a body at all.

So he silently flew through the darkness, tossed away by that bizarre oddity that still made his head hurt just by thinking about it. Thrown off to some other pitch black corner of oblivion.

Or that's what he would've thought, if he hadn't suddenly felt some strange transition as he continued flying. As he felt the space around him begin to twist and get heavier, like he was diving deep into the crushing depths of an ocean and suddenly got pulled back up.

Light and heavy, up and down, fast and slow, all these different feelings and sensations wracked his body all at once as he kept

moving towards some unknown objective. Even as the front of his body was suddenly swallowed up by some strange light and he felt air on his body again.

Only to find himself waking up in a world in flames.

oOoOoOoOo Kischur Zelretch Schweinorg oOoOoOoOo

"_Sigh_. And I was having such a relaxing day."

Oh yes, quite relaxing in fact. Kicking back to watch his dastardly plans unfold through various viewing portals was one of the highlights of his days. Watching the embarrassment and shame appear on people's faces, a nice bit of music in the background, all with a nice drink of well-aged Chianti wine, oh it was _wonderful_.

It was even better today because he'd worked on some _really_ good ones to give these boring letdowns some excitement. Sitting down in their chairs only to activate a spell that made their clothes disappear, whole classes finding themselves dumped in Hawaii, choruses of dogs howling rock and roll songs, and so many other wonderful treats. It was _heavenly_ seeing it all come together into a symphony of delicious chaos as he formed a pyramid with his fingers and said "just as planned".

'_So why, oh WHY, did something have to interrupt it?_'

He'd long since set up systems to warn him of anything dangerous enough to warrant his attention. A globe made up of precious metals with a series of rings constantly swirling around it. The rings themselves each contained a gem filled with prana, used as a marker for anything that fit into their programming as worthy of his attention. Upon discovering something, a ring would rotate in a position for the gemstone to hover over the area in question and give a pinpoint location with a tiny beam of light.

Such a thing had happened often enough, but this case actually seemed particularly odd. Why, you ask? Because it wasn't just one ring and gemstone showing a location. _ALL_ of the rings had ceased their rotation to focus on a single point. He might be old, but his memory was still sharp enough to know _that_ had never happened before.

And then he saw the location. Japan. Right in Fuyuki City in the middle of the Holy Grail War.

'_Wonderful._'

The Wizard Marshall was a very confident man, fully aware of his abilities and how it compared to the rest of the world. He was well aware of what level he stood on as master of the Kaleidoscope and a Dead Apostle Ancestor, not to mention his great capability for conventional Magecraft that he'd honed over the centuries.

Yet that awareness also made him aware that there would always be people stronger, however rare they might be. It was a lesson he'd learned while battling Crimson Moon, a fight that made it clear he could never allow himself to dull. And that awareness extended to the Holy Grail Wars.

There weren't many people or entities of the modern day that could

challenge him, he could even count the number of real threats to his power on one hand (two if he was being generous), but the Grail Wars weren't limited to the here and now. They pulled heroes and legends from across history in a contest of arms, each of them the pinnacle of might in their own age, in the era's where Humanity was far more potent than it was now. He was well aware of his own power, he had bested Crimson Moon after all, and he was duly confident as a result. But more than anything, or anywhere, the Holy Grail War was one of the only situations where he could encounter something that could present a threat to him.

And this new entity had appeared right in the middle of it all.

But, even as he breathed out a sigh of discontent, the man still rose from his seat. He was known as a great many things, at least half of them courtesy of the Vice Director herself and less than flattering, but never let it be said he was lax in his responsibilities.

â€|..Well, most of the time. Either way, this current oddity was something too potentially significant to ignore. Not to mention far too interesting for him to simply let it go unattended.

After all, when was the last time someone had come from beyond the dimensional veil?

So, with merely a thought and a twirl of his gemstone studded cane, he crossed the thousands of miles away from his home in London to the source of the disturbance. And as he appeared, he was made witness to a city in flames.

oOoOoOoOo Eric oOoOoOoOo

It was burning. Scorching. Searing in a way that immolated him down to his very soul. It honestly felt like he'd woken up in Hell.

Eric wasn't even sure how he got up, but he was on his feet and moving before he even noticed the world moving around him. Hearing the collapsing of buildings as their supports ere devoured by flames, the screams of the dying and lost, hearing the hellish crackling of the fires around him as it ate away at the world.

He felt his feet seem to crisp slightly as he ran away, barely noticing as he rushed over hot coals in his scramble to escape. It was so hot that he couldn't even sweat, it seemed to get turned to steam the moment it appeared on his skin. He could even swear he was feeling his skin crackle slightly from the heat.

And then there was all the screaming. There was no doubt he wasn't alone here in this inferno, he'd heard dozens of screaming voices around him. Mothers crying for dying children, children calling for their dead parents, screams of fear and agony as flames closed in and burned people alive.

He had no doubt that, wherever he may be, it was the very picture of Hell on Earth.

'WHERE THE HELL DID I GET DROPPED OFF?!'

But he didn't have time to think about that right now, not if he wanted to get out of here and survive. He had to escape, had to get out of the inferno. But he seemed to get weaker with every step. The heat bearing down on him like a physical force, the smoke all but blinding him and burning his throat with every breath as it was caked with the ash.

He could barely navigate through the hellish landscape, the flames and rubble seeming to keep appearing in front of him everywhere he seemed to go. The panic in him slowly continued to build as it became clearer and clearer that he wouldn't be able to escape, that he'd be burned alive here and his body would be reduced to just so many ashes.

He was going to die. He was really going to die here in this scorching gate to hell. He may as well have never woken up from that empty void.

As that realization sank in, all his desperate strength seemed to simply leave his body. His limbs became heavy as pieces of metal and he fell to the hot ground. He belatedly realized that it seemed a little clearer down at the earth, probably because the smoke was all up above ground level.

There was the sound of another building collapsing somewhere and a man shouting something in the distance. He would've hoped the man could find him in time, but he didn't see any point in it. The fire was too close for someone to arrive in time and getting closer still. He'd be burned to death in just a few minutes.

As his heavy eyelids closed down and his vision went black, the last thing he saw just had to be a hallucination. How else could the fires around him have disappeared and revealed the feet of some unknown man?

oOoOoOoOo Kischur Zelretch Schweinorg oOoOoOoOo

"Well well, what have we here?"

Let it be known that Zelretch, master of the Second True Magic, Wizard Marshall of the Clock Tower, and many more things, was a very old man. He'd been around the block more than his fair share of times, seen plenty of odd and notable things (usually while kicking their asses in a suitably awesome manner), met a great deal of interesting people, and still had quite a few more interesting encounters besides.

But this was definitely the first time he'd encountered someone not of this world.

â€|Well, that wasn't entirely accurate. He had encountered something not of this world, followed by immediately killing it to save this little speck of cosmic dirt, but this was something different. This boy wasn't just from a different planet, he was from a different dimension entirely. He could honestly say he'd never encountered a situation quite like this before.

And that's what made it so interesting.

Bending down slightly for a better look, Zelretch gave the object of

his attention a once over. A boy, probably 11 years old or so with light brown hair. His was dressed in a white t-shirt with slacks and lacking any shoes, his exposed skin covered in soot, scratches and more than a few light burns from proximity to the fire.

His feet had it the worst, burned and cracking from the heat as blood leaked from the injuries. It honestly looked like some of the skin from the bottom of his feet had melted off. It was a small miracle he'd been walking at all.

His eyes briefly darted to the back of his right hand. Did he see a slight glow on it? Must've been his imagination.

He clicked his tongue a few times, still looking down. "But what to _do_ with you?"

He honestly hadn't expected something like this when he'd set out. Zelretch had thought it was probably some paranormal entity or potential threat, not just some boy who crashed through the barriers of dimensions and arrived here. He had come here expecting a fight, notâ€¦|.._this_.

Fortunately, the old Vampire happened to be rather good at dealing with surprises. How could he not be after living with the shock of being turned into a Dead Apostle? And it had been centuries since that particular incident.

He took barely a moment to make the surrounding ash and dirt disappear before he knelt down and put a hand on the boy. Channeling some Prana, the Wizard Marshall put some healing Magecraft to use and worked to repair the damage. Extracting the ash in his throat and lungs, healing the scratches and burns, even repairing his feet to the point where they looked good as new.

But he was barely paying attention to the process, his interest was more focused on what he'd noticed internally of the boy's body.

Magic Circuits. Quite a few of them, too. He'd encountered a fair few Magi with 30 natural Magic Circuits, but never someone completely unaffiliated with the supernatural world. Not to mention they were of rather high quality, significantly higher than the average Mage.

Could his travel through the dimensional boundaries have done something to his body? Activated or altered his Magic Circuits? That was something Zelretch could honestly say he didn't have an answer for. Quite the rarity.

"Just who are you, boy?"

He gained no answer from the target of his curiosity, tired and unconscious on the ground as he was. The small fry probably didn't even know what was happening around him right now.

Regardless, Zelretch was starting to be quite happy with his arrival. It looked like he'd found something interesting after all.

It was just too bad Zelretch had the unfortunate tendency of driving the subjects of such interest crazy. '_Ah well, maybe this one will

be lucky._'

oOoOoOoOo Eric oOoOoOoOo

'_Since when did the ground ever feel soft?_' Eric thought absently.
'_Grass? No, how could there have been grass in a place like-_'

His upper body catapulted up with a jolt as the memories came back to him; screams, fire, heat, death, _dying_!

It took him a few minutes of shaking and hugging his own legs to his body before he realized he wasn't standing in that searing inferno. There wasn't any consuming fire around him and he wasn't in the middle of a burning city or lying on the hard ground of a street.

Instead, he was in a bed, and a very _comfortable_ one at that. Not just that, but he was apparently in some room. Certainly not one he'd recognized, given the lavish furniture and accommodations. A great Persian rug covered the whole floor, great emblems and patterns so clear that it looked practically new. There was also a few pieces of quality furniture, including a couch with a low coffee table and a couple of nice chairs. He vaguely noted that they were all of rather high quality leather, but that wasn't what stood out the most to him.

'_I didn't even know furniture COULD have gold trim._'

No joke, quite a bit of the furniture actually had some gold trim or highlights. And not just gold, he also saw some _gems_ encrusted in small tables or a nearby lamp. Just one of these pieces of furniture could probably be sold for enough to buy a decent house, to say nothing of everything in the whole room.

But it still went a long way towards making two things very clear. One was that whoever owned this place was loaded beyond his wildest dreams. Second wasâ€|wellâ€|. '_Toto, we're not in Kansas anymore._'

He'd actually lived in California, but the point still remained untarnished.

Carefully slipping out of the bed, he couldn't help but notice that something felt very _off_ with his body. Maybe it was because of the fire? That made sense, it was probably still recovering.

Walking around the room for a minute, he was surprised to note that the furniture was significantly larger than he'd thought. As it made for somebody with gigantism? It was certainly big enough for someone like that.

He quickly spotted the door and headed to open it, only to be interrupted as the knob turned and someone else pushed it in before he reached it. The man who walked in was tall and obviously old, his hair and goatee all carrying the deep grey of old age, slight wrinkles visible across his face.

But, despite all those signs of age, he still moved with a crispness that implied a great deal of vitality and physical capability. He was pretty sure this old man wouldn't spend the rest of his life in a

wheelchair.

'_But why does he seem so familiar?_'

Really, something about the old man just looked so familiar to him. The outfit, the hair, the general appearance. But no matter how hard he tried, he just couldn't place it.

"Ah, so you've woken up." The old man smiled down at him. "That's good. I was starting to wonder if I'd just brought you here for nothing, little boy."

His eyebrow twitched. _Little boy_? What was that about? He hadn't been called that sinceâ€¦.wait a minute.

Eyes widening in dawning horror, he darted around the room to find something with a decently reflective surface. Lacking a mirror, he was forced to use the reflective metals of a nearby lamp to check. Looking at the face staring back at him, his worst fear had just been confirmed.

"I'M A FUCKING KID!"

He was vaguely aware of the old man's booming laughter in the background, shoved into the back of his mind as his thoughts were thrown into a panicked frenzy at the discovery. He was focused on something _much_ more important.

The fact that he was a kid again!

Seriously, how did it happen? He was pretty sure it's impossible for something to age backwards. It was biologically impossible.

â€¦..Well, except for the rather aptly nicknamed Immortal Jellyfish, but that wasn't really important right now. What was important was that he was a damned _kid_ again!

He paled as the reality of it really sunk in. Damn, going through puberty for a second time was gonna be hell. Then of course there was school and all that droll crap that would make him fall asleep in class. Dealing with all the cliques and jackasses, going through the lessons he probably already knew, the lectures, the horrible acne, the time wasted listening to stuff that went in one ear and out the other, and dear _GOD_ all the damned _HOMEWORK_!

Which was to say _nothing_ of what would go on outside the school itself. Being ten years old meant all the previous independence he enjoyed was all _gone_. He couldn't drive, couldn't vote, couldn't do _anything_ important at all.

He wasn't sure when he started hyperventilating, but he was lucky enough to notice it soon enough to cut it down before it got worse.

'_Okay, so you know the bad stuff. Let's see if you can think of the things that DON'T make this horrible._'

Let's seeâ€¦..Oh, he wasn't a baby! That was a surprisingly big one when you thought about it. He didn't even want to _think_ of

stumbling around in a damn diaper. _Especially_ if his baby body lacked the physical control to keep from shitting itself. Then there was also the _insufferable_ baby talk, along with the crib and the little toys and nobody taking him seriously.

Granted, they wouldn't take a 10 year old very seriously, but at least he could actually _speak_.

He nodded his head. '_Okay, maybe this won't be TOO horrible._' Granted, it wasn't perfect, but it could definitely be worse.

"My, such _language_ from such a little boy." He didn't even need to turn around to know the old man was smiling. "What would your parents think, I wonder?"

He flinched slightly at that, struck silent. '_My parents._'

â€|.Well, at least he wouldn't need to worry about them worrying themselves to death over him. They were already too dead for that.

It was kinda funny in some ways. When you're a kid you honestly seem to think you'll have your parents around forever, a notion that doesn't entirely disappear even after you actually grow up a bit and understand that people can really die.

So it always seems to catch you by surprise when you hear they just died from something like a car crash.

It had happened a few years ago, but that didn't make it hurt any less.

Eric's brief bout of depression was cut a bit short when he felt a hand suddenly rest on his shoulder. Turning his head, he looked straight into the red eyes of the first person he'd seen since he woke up.

"Bad choice of words?" he questioned, his face and tone absent of any of the humor from before.

"Yeah," he admitted, voice flat. He knew it wasn't the old man's fault, he had no idea about what had happened, but it still hurt a bit.

â€|.Well, they said time healed all wounds didn't they? This at least gave him some more time, if nothing else.

But that still left a certain question unanswered.

"Where am I?"

The man's face took a notably less serious look at his question, apparently getting some of his good humor back. "You're in London right now. More specifically, you're in the Clock Tower."

He narrowed his eyes at the man's wording. Why did he decide to specifically mention the Clock Tower? Were they in Big Ben or something? _That_ Clock Tower?

Looking around, he decided on a definite no. He was pretty sure the Clock Tower of London wasn't a residential area for anybody, regardless of how rich. So what else could he be talking about?

"Don't suppose you'll give me any more details?"

He regretted the words barely a second later as the elderly man's smile gained a predatory look. "Nope. That's all you get."

'_Something tells me I'm gonna learn to be terrified of that smile._'

Regardless, it looked like he'd have to find out more on his own. This guy might have apparently saved him, but that looked like it was all he was gonna do for now.

Looking around the room, he gave the furniture a closer look to see if he could find any clues. Any kind of marking or indication of where he was would be appreciated. Especially if he could find some kind of window to see the outside.

Unfortunately, it quickly became clear that there was neither a window to see through nor some kind of indication of where he was. The furniture all looked Western in configuration, but that really wasn't saying much. He could be on the other side of the world for all he knew.

Frustrated at the lack of results, he turned to look at the old man again with an angry glower. "_No_ hints?"

His glower intensified as the elder flashed him another smile. "Take a look in the drawer of the bedside table."

And his glower immediately disappeared. The bedside table drawer? Did the old man really just give him a suggestion? The suspicious look returned for a moment. "What happened to no hints?"

"You were taking too long," the man replied. "I can't spend all my time watching you stumble around in this little room. Business before entertainment and all that."

He almost didn't notice his hands clenching at that. Seriously, entertainment? This guy considered someone stumbling around looking for clues about his whereabouts to be funny? Talk about a sick sense of humor.

He had the chilling notion that he was gonna be very familiar with this man's particular brand of humor, but did his best to shove it into the back of his mind. No point getting paranoid about it.

Still, he made sure to keep an eye on the old man as he moved to the indicated table. The geezer might not have tried anything yet, but Eric had the distinct impression that he shouldn't let his guard down around him. Those instincts had never served him wrong before, so he was pretty sure they wouldn't fail him now.

Slowly making his way over, he reached out a hand and opened the

drawer to check the contents inside. Taking his eyes off the strange old man for a moment, he briefly flicked his vision over to the opened drawer to see what could be inside. Followed by his brows drawing together slightly in confusion.

"A book?"

"Give it a gander," the geezer encouraged, that same smile still on his face. "I'm sure you'll find the material quite interesting."

'_Just open up and read a book while this guy is watching me in the same room?_' Not exactly a very encouraging mental image, all things considered. He didn't _seem_ like he was gonna try anything, but Eric couldn't help but note that the caution sense in the back of his head was still screaming '_RED ALERT!_'

Unfortunately, there really wasn't any better option. He had no idea where he was in the world and there weren't any other potential leads in this room. No marks or signs or anything. Even the Persian Rug wasn't much of a hint, given those things tended to be valuable commodities to anyone with money, it just showed this guy in front of him was loaded. And that was a message the rest of the furniture already made pretty damn clear.

With a sigh of resignation, Eric reached into the drawer and retrieved the book in question. Well, calling it a booklet would probably have been generous, it looked like more of a small guide of some kind. The title thoughâ€|..

[The Clock Tower â€" Grand Institution of Thaumaturgy]

'_The Clock Tower?_' Eric questioned mentally. '_Thaumaturgy? Why does that sound-_'

â€|.Oh God no.

Furiously flipping through the booklet, Eric looked over everything written down, poured over every word to find something to prove this as all a prank or just some fevered dream. He vaguely recalled that a rumor that reading was impossible in dreams, but he was too panicked to really care right now.

And the information in the booklet _really_ wasn't helping. Hell, it actually seemed to be making his panic even _worse_. Why? _Because it was so fucking ACCURATE_!

It had the history of the organization in question, the names of every prominent member and founder, information on the departments and their focuses, _everything_!

He went through it several times, looking for anything that could hint at this all being an elaborate prank or joke. He even started laughing at some point, practically delirious at the whole damned thing. And all the while he tried to convince himself that this wasn't real. That it _couldn't_ be real!

But he didn't wake up from the dream. Nobody walked out of somewhere to say "We got you good!" Nothing.

And that was when he remembered something else. Something that happened to be very important, in fact. Something he missed before, but not this time as he took another look at the old man by the door.

"Who are you?" he asked, the words coming out like a desperate croaking sound.

The old man—the Mage—smiled at him and took a flourishing bow. "I am Kischur Zelretch Schweinorg, Wizard Marshall, Old Man of the Jewels, Zelretch of the Jewels, and occasionally referred to as the Kaleidoscope or 'The Wizard That Did It'."

He turned his face up to flash him a wink. "The last one is my favorite."

It took all of Eric's willpower to keep himself from fainting. Because now, beyond any shadow of a doubt, he knew that this had to be real. This man was really the most powerful Mage alive in the Nasuverse, the man who took down Crimson Moon!

And he was really in the Nasuverse! Screw not in Kansas anymore, he literally wasn't on the same fucking PLANET!

He couldn't help what happened next as his hands grasped his head and his expression turned up to the ceiling.

"I'M FUCKED!"

oOoOoOoOo Kischur Zelretch Schweinorg oOoOoOoOo

'Maybe I was wrong about how much fun he'd be.'

Really, all the lad seemed to do now was keep himself locked inside the room Zelretch had so generously granted him. It was admittedly understandable, given that the young man had just found out he had been transported to a whole new world, but still a bit disappointing. Hopefully the boy would get over it soon enough and start acting more fun.

He knew he was probably being rather harsh, but overcoming difficulties and adversity was a part of Human nature, a part that he wholeheartedly supported. The will to overcome and rise above, the determination to come out on top regardless of any obstacle, the desperation to keep going no matter what you did or who you had to beat.

After all, it was that very quality that pushed Zelretch himself to stand against Crimson Moon and come out the victor. He paid a price for it, both with body and Magic, but he considered it worth it. And it was a fight he'd do again in a heartbeat if necessary.

He could only hope the boy would overcome his own trial here, that fear and shock that was holding him back. He'd seemed so promising before, a visitor from across dimensions with a rather sizeable number of high quality Magic Circuits. With time and teaching the boy could become something GRAND, he just knew it.

But he couldn't do anything while his fear worked as an invisible shackle, keeping him in that room.

With a sigh leaving his lips, the Wizard Marshall poured himself some coffee and kicked back in his comfy chair once more, turning on some viewing portals to watch the comings and goings of the Clock Tower and see if he could spot anything interesting.

Unfortunately, it seemed today was going to be another slow day. He caught sight of a young student using some basic Magecraft to set up a prank on a teacher, but not much more. Beyond that brief shot of amusement there wasn't really much else.

'_Oh come on,_' he mentally whined. '_Won't someone do SOMETHING? Throw a goddamn water balloon full of paint, make clothes disappear, I'd even take a damn whoopee cushion!_'

But the world didn't respond to his silent plea, sticking to the calm and uniformity as if to spite him.

He groaned in despair, his gaze momentarily shifting over to the closed door to the room that was now occupied.

He really hoped the boy snapped out of it sometime soon.

oOoOoOoOo Eric oOoOoOoOo

The former 20 year old and current child who happened to be the subject of Zelretch's thoughts was currently in a fetal position on the bed, creating a noticeable crater in the mattress beneath him. He's been in roughly the same position for a while by now, only leaving or alternating it whenever he either ate the food Zelretch brought him or when he headed off to use the bathroom.

It had been two days since he'd suddenly woken up in this room by now. Two days since he'd found out he'd been transported into the Nasuverse. Two days since he'd discovered he'd woken up in the Clock Tower. Two days since he'd met Zelretch face to face!

Seriously, that last one was big enough to deserve the extra emphasis. Zelretch was a big deal. You don't exactly get to punch out an abomination from outer space and not be a big deal.

But that revelation didn't exactly do much for him right now. Not for the situation he'd found himself in.

Honestly, it was kinda funny. He'd heard about stuff like this before, he even remembered reading fanfictions about it. Some guy from the real world ended up getting transported into some fictional work and, put simply, shit happened.

More often than not it was kinda fun to read, at least as long as it was done right. But it got a little annoying when they just devolved into something for wish fulfillment. When it made things look easy.

But waking up in a whole new world, especially a dangerous one? It wasn't easy, it was terrifying!

The thought that you've woken up in a world with nobody you know? Knowing you've unintentionally left behind everything and everybody that even meant something to you? Wondering about how they might

react to finding out you've disappeared?

â€|Well, at least in his case, they'd have a body to bury. Unless the corpse he left behind just disintegrated or ended up getting dragged here and being healed into this new body of his. He honestly hoped neither of those possibilities was the case, it would be nice at least for his friends to have a corpse to bury. Something to get some closure over.

And that was saying nothing about the world you may have been transported into. There was a little saying he remembered hearing somewhere: There's no such thing as a safe anime. That might sound a little cynical, but it was true.

Hell, plenty of anime that looked kid friendly were actually pretty damn scary when you took away all the sugar and rainbows. Naruto was a series about child soldiers being trained to kill in a perpetual Cold War. Dragon Ball Z was about fights between heroes and enemies that could casually destroy whole planets (not to mention the villains actually seemed to do that quite often).

Point being: those worlds tended to be very dangerous. And here he was, dropped straight into a world that was probably among the worst.

A world of horrifying monsters like the Dead Apostles, constantly circled by the Types, Magi that were distant at best and psychopathic at worst, and plenty of other scary shit caught in-between.

In retrospect, could anyone really blame him for being scared? Hell, being turned into a kid was peanuts compared to being dropped off here. Especially in this particular place. The Clock Tower was essentially the headquarters of the Magi, with all the best and worst of them being concentrated here in an eternal combination of research and political backstabbing.

And they'd probably love to get their hands on him.

Seriously, it wasn't exactly every day that someone from another world suddenly dropped by. Especially if the visitor was from another dimension. Doubly so if they also happened to be from a dimension where your world existed as various forms of media entertainment. He wasn't sure what they'd do and he wasn't sure he even wanted to know, but he knew it wouldn't be good.

And it looked like he was stuck here. Zelretch might be able to get him back home, he even already knew about his weird situation, but Eric wouldn't exactly put money on it. If the whole Multiverse idea was real (and he was pretty sure by this point that it was) then it would take honestly impossible luck for Zelretch to actually stumble onto it.

So he was stuck here. Stuck and helpless. Was that how he was going to spend out his life? Staying in this room until he withered and died? Only leaving to grab something to eat or use the damn bathroom?

...No, justâ€|..just NO! "No way in hell."

Seriously, that wasn't even funny. Just stay here in this room for

the rest of his life? That wouldn't be a life at all.

Yeah, this world was dangerous, probably one of the most dangerous, but people still survived. They still won, they still kept on going, so why couldn't he do it?

The question for him was just how he was going to survive. Keeping hidden wouldn't work, he'd still be helpless if someone found him. Attaching himself to Zelretch might keep him safe for a while, but he wasn't sure if he wanted to rely on anyone's good graces forever like some kind of leech. Besides, there were some entities in the world even Zelretch wouldn't be able to protect him from.

And that just left one option. To become strong enough to protect himself.

He absently thought back to something the Wizard Marshall had told him before, back when he'd still been almost hysterical and asked the man why he'd brought him here.

"I thought it might be interesting to keep you around. Your body didn't come out of the transition unchanged."

Thatâ€¦that choice of wording bothered him. Something had happened to his body? Yeah, he was pretty damn aware that he'd aged backwards, but the way the Wizard Marshall said it implied more than that. What else could haveâ€¦hold on, could he have actually gained Magic Circuits?

Looking at his hands, he gave them a brief clench before relaxing them. He didn't feel any different, but he also remembered that Magic Circuits weren't an entirely physical thing in the body. Still, was it really possible he gained them?

'â€¦Only one way to find out.'

His mind made up and an objective set, he maneuvered his body until his legs were over the side of the bed and he slid off. He stumbled slightly as he landed, barely keeping his balance as he put weight on his legs. Guess not using your legs much for two days straight could do that to you. Go figure.

So on slightly wobbly legs (only slightly, stop snickering at the image) he walked to the door, ready to take his first step to overcome this new world.

Followed by his serious mood shattering as he saw the most powerful Mage in the world pouting like a child who'd had his favorite toy confiscated as he looked into some weird window in space. "Oh come ON! Somebody at least throw a damn PIE! I WANT TO SEE A FOOD FIGHT!"

â€¦Maaaaybe this guy wasn't his best bet after all.

oOoOoOoOo Kischur Zelretch Schweinorg oOoOoOoOo

"Seriously," the most powerful living Mage grumbled, his disappointment all but a physical presence in the air. "Can't someone do something? What does an old man have to do for some entertainment?"

And thus, with a dimmed enthusiasm, the Wizard Marshall leaned back into his chair with a sigh of resignation. He imagined he looked the exact opposite of the dignified persona he often projected in front of others, looking like a pouting child. He couldn't really bring himself to care about it, and it wasn't like anybody could really see him right now.

â€|.Well, except for one in particular. "I know you're there. You can come out now."

It almost brought a smile to his face as he heard the boy physically start. Getting a nervous reaction out of people wasn't exactly high on his list of favorite pastimes, but it could still be a little satisfying.

Deciding to milk the situation for all it's worth, he steeped his fingers in front of his face, his elbows on the armrests of his dear chair, and slowly swiveled it around to face the young man who'd FINALLY come out of that room.

He'd practiced this very act many times to get it just right. That intimidating scene as he swiveled around and looked someone in the eye with his crimson orbs. He'd even arranged to have some select crystals in the room light up behind him as he stared the boy down, casting ominous shadows as his eyes seemed to glow. Fingers steeped in front of his face and looking for all the world like some kind of diabolical mastermind.

Which he kinda was, if you looked at things from the proper angle. He was an extremely important member of a secret society that spread across the whole world, he had almost complete access to the organization's resources and personnel at his fingertips, and plenty of people in the Clock Tower treaded lightly around him like their lives depended on it.

It was actually their sanity that they had to worry about, but that was besides the point.

Which made it a little surprising when the mere boy in front of him didn't seem intimidated. He just seemed toâ€|stare at him for a moment with a rather flat look on his face. It only lasted for a moment before the boy sighed and shook his head at him, a small but noticeable smile on his face.

"You ripped that out of a James Bond movie, didn't you?"

The Wizard Marshall blinked slightly at that before his face morphed into a chiding glare.

Yeas, a glare. He most certainly wasn't pouting at the unfortunate failure of the maneuver he'd spent months practicing. Don't judge! He was a damned VAMPIRE! Who was really going to say he was wasting time?

Seeming to deflate as he let out another sigh, Zelretch looked at the boy with a light glower. "Damn, you just had to ruin the moment. Do you have any idea how long I've worked on that?"

He brought a hand up to his face and faked a sniffle. "And to think

it can't even work on some little boy. What's this world coming to?
Oh _boohoo_."

He could hear a snort as the boy began his retort. "Isn't it obvious why it didn't work?"

Ooh, a fellow joker? Zelretch pulled off the hand he was holding over his face, looking at the lad who had _dared_ to snark back. "Oh? Then tell me, dear brat, what's the secret I'm missing?"

The boy didn't disappoint.

"You don't have a cat with you," he retorted, tone flat as the business end of a hammer. "All diabolical masterminds need a cat, it's the secret to their intimidation." He gestured to the room around him. "You also don't have a damned _shark tank_! Or laser turrets! Or sharks with _lasers_ on their heads!"

The boy shook his head, making a tsk'ing sound of disapproval. "So much wasted potential. They should really make a manual."

"Good advice," the Dead Apostle agreed. "I'll have to take that into consideration. And a manual might not be a bad idea. Imagine the potential! You're onto something big."

They took a moment to share a laugh at that, the atmosphere lighting up a little with some real humor. He'd honestly been worried if he'd be able to get any laughs at all today.

But eventually the laughter dimmed to chuckles and the room was quiet again, though with a much nicer atmosphere this time. "Well, this was fun. But I take it you didn't just come out to play Bond Villain with me. What's on your mind?"

oOoOoOoOo Eric oOoOoOoOo

'_What's on my mind, huh?_' Well, wasn't _that_ the question of the day. Put simply, his mind was kicking into overdrive right now to try and find a way to get what he needed to survive. The only way available that he could see was to become a Mage.

â€|.Actually, screw that. He didn't just need to become a Mage, he needed to become a _powerful_ Mage. And Zelretch was probably his best bet.

But the question was whether or not the vampiric geezer would actually do so. He knew from canon that the old man was very unpredictable and prone to following his whims, so it was possible. The guy had even brought him here from that hellish shell of a city and saved his life. He was pretty sure that wouldn't have happened if the old man hadn't found something in him that was worth his time.

He was just about to answer when the Big Z spoke for him.

"It has to do with you suddenly being dropped into this new world, doesn't it?"

Eric froze in place as the words registered. He was almost surprised that the old man could read him like that, but not by all that much.

Zelretch was plenty of things, but stupid was definitely not one of them. Not by a long shot.

He let out an awkward chuckle. "Is it really that obvious?"

The big man didn't even offer a response, just staring at him with those crimson eyes. '_Why am I suddenly hoping he isn't thirsty?_'

Shaking the thought out of his head, Eric pressed forward. Nervously clearing his throat, he looked into those red eyes and spoke. "You said something happened to my body when I came here, right? Besidesâ€¦" he took a moment to gesture over his own body. His very new and small body. "Besides this?"

The Wizard Marshall nodded at him. "Yes, your body was altered as it came her. Though I must admit I'm not entirely sure how."

Okay, that was a start. He got the first question out, so now came the next one. He had to lead from one to the next without making it seem forced. "What was the change?"

He almost pulled back when Zelretch flashed him a smirk with a decidedly predatory edge. '_He's not gonna eat me, he's not gonna eat me, he's not gonna eat me, he's NOT GONNA EAT ME._'

"Don't try and play dumb with me. You know exactly what happened to your body."

Eric was under the distinct impression that the old nut in front of him was quite enjoying the sight of him freezing in shock. In fact, he was pretty much sure of it. The old Dead Apostle lived for messing with people, of course he'd find this enjoyable.

But Eric wasn't really in the mood to play that little game right now. Taking a deep breath and letting it out in a slow sigh, he did his best to let the tension leave his body along with the breath.

It didn't work as well as he'd hoped, but at least he could bring himself to talk again. Something he put to use as he looked the most powerful living Magus in the eye. "Guess I shouldn't be surprised you know, huh?"

Zelretch shrugged at that, but he didn't answer. It really wasn't all that surprising. The old man was the undisputed master of the Second Magic, the Sorcery and True Magic that REVOLVED around the comprehension and manipulation of parallel dimensions. It would be impossible for him not to know.

But the way he said it was odd. Saying that Eric knew exactly what had happened to him? That meant he must've known about what Magic Circuits were in the first place, but he could only know if he was either a born Magus orâ€¦.Oh. Oh, holy crap!

With a slack jaw that he was sure Zelretch enjoyed to see, Eric stared at the man as it all lined up in his head. "You know which world I come from." He didn't even bother phrasing it as a question. The man's nod in response just sealed it all.

"I do," he admitted, rising up from his seat and grabbing his cane

with a twirl in his hand. "I've actually observed it a few times, though I never really got involved. I also have no idea how that Nasu fellow has been getting all his ideas. Maybe he's some kind of seer." Cane twirling in hand, the old man stepped toward Eric and bowed down slightly. "Would you like to go back at all? I could make it happen."

'_Go back?_'

â€¦It was tempting. _Very_ tempting to just say yes and go home. He almost said yes, butâ€¦

"No," he answered. "At leastâ€¦not right now."

If Zelretch was surprised then he sure didn't show it. He probably had a great poker face. "Can I ask why?"

Eric grimaced. "It's justâ€¦as much as I _want_ to, I know it won't really be the same." He held up a hand, looking it over and noticing every difference from the one he recognized. The skin was a slightly more pale tone, and it didn't have that scar on the base of his pinky that he got in Highschool Wood Shop. He remembered looking at his reflection a once when he went to the bathroom. His first thought had almost been '_Who's that?_'

Kinda depressing, if you think about it. He justâ€¦

"I'm just not that Eric anymore," he whispered, not even noticing as Zelretch's face slightly shifted to curiosity. "I'm too young, not to mention I don't look anything like I used to. What would really happen if I went back there?"

He felt the slightly pained smile form on his face. "Eric is already dead back home, that's the story and there's a corpse to back it up. I doubt any of my old friends will respond well to me walking up and saying "It's me guys, I'm back from the dead". There's no way they'd believe me."

He stopped talking for a moment and silence enveloped the room, working up the nerve to keep talking. "It just wouldn't work. They're probably already trying to move on andâ€¦I doubt me just popping up again would really help. I don't really have any family left, either, so where would I have to go? An orphanage? I justâ€¦I really can't see me going back there actually fixing anything. Not like this."

He sighed, letting all the tension leave him. It wasn't nice, but it wasn't any less true. "Eric from back home is dead. Maybe I could go back and visit, see how my friends are doing, butâ€¦..not for a while."

"So you'll be staying here?"

Eric smiled at the question, particularly the tone behind it. It almost soundedâ€¦amused? Something like that. "Looks like it." He turned his eyes back to the man in front of him, determination setting back in. "And that's why I wanted to talk with you. But I'm pretty sure you already know what it's about."

Zelretch smiled at him again, this time without the predatory edge. If anything, the old man actually seemed overjoyed. "Indeed I do," he

answered, rising back up to his full height. "And I accept. From now on, you'll be my apprentice." A hint of mischief entered his eyes as he said that. "Just try not to fall apart like all the others, good apprentices are so hard to find. I want you to at least survive a full year."

He scoffed at that. "Screw a year, you're stuck with me for the full damn term."

The Wizard Marshall's smile took on a hint of challenge at that. "Oh? Bold words, my dear boy, very bold. Let's see if you can back it up." Clearing his throat for a moment, the elderly vampire seemed to ponder something over. "By the way, what should we do about your name?"

'My name?' "What's wrong with Eric?"

"Nothing, nothing at all," he answered, flicking his wrist like some sign of dismissal. "But what about the rest. Just Eric won't be enough of an identity for you to live here."

That wasâ€¦..actually a good point. What should the rest of his name be? He couldn't use the rest of his old name, not when he had to leave that behind. "Good point butâ€¦..I'm drawing a bit of a blank. Any ideas?"

He realized a little too late that letting the Multiverse's biggest troll decide on you name might not be the best idea. A revelation that he only realized as the man smirked down on him like the Devil offering a contract.

Which meant he was all the more surprised when the old man actually game up with something that actually didn't sound crazy. Hell, that the old joker gave him a name that could even be useful.

"Eric Maxwell Schweinorg," he said, his tone oddly serious. "That will be your new name here. I trust it's satisfactory?"

Satisfactory? It was probably more than just satisfactory, it actually sounded pretty awesome! He said it a few times, letting it roll off the tongue to get a feel for it.

Yeah, he could get used to a name like that. But the Schweinorg partâ€¦..

"You do know how much attention I'll get from having your family name, right?" Seriously, he might as well be painting a target on the back of his head. People might not move overtly against him, but there was always gonna be some idiot that wanted to impress everyone.

"Oh, don't worry about that," the old man dismissed with a wave of his hand. "You can just introduce yourself as Eric Maxwell to most. It shouldn't turn too many heads."

Oh. Fair enough, that sounded like it could work. "As long as I don't have to call you Papa. You're way too old for that."

"Oh," the Dead Apostle whined, a hand over his heart. "My boy, how

you wound me. Just for that I'll make your training _especially_ entertaining."

And Eric most certainly _didn't_ feel a chill go down his spine at that. Nope. Not at all.

Trying to distract himself from thinking on what the crazy super-senior had in mind, he decided to voice a question. "Why Maxwell?"

He instantly went on guard when the geezer actually looked serious. He was pretty sure a _serious_ Zelretch was a very _dangerous_ Zelretch. The notion didn't waver as the man seemed to stare off into the distance.

"It's a name very dear to my heart. One that I will treasure always, in tribute to my greatest companion."

â€|Oh. Wow, now he was actually feeling kinda honored-

"He was such a _WONDERFUL_ doggie!"

And just like that, the moment was over. Zelretch's face back to its mischievous look and Eric looking at him with a flat expression and a searing glare.

'_I really should've kept my mouth shut._'

****xXx****

Yo! To those of you who are reading this because the notification popped up and you decided to give it a try, thank you for your support. I greatly appreciate it. To all others who skimmed this fic's description and decided to give it a try, a big thanks to all of you for deciding to give it a try.

First off, I want to say that you probably shouldn't expect updates for this fic to be very frequent. I've got other fics that I also want to give fair time to and I'm honestly considering of putting some of my other ideas out on the site. For those of you who are reading this as the first of my fics you've experienced, thank you for giving it a try and feel free to peruse some of my others on my profile.

For those who are curious, the next fic I'll work on is The Will To Power, followed by World of Remnant: Online. I'll then try to put more chapters out for A Scorpion's Disciple.

Review and have a nice day!

End
file.